United Nations E/C.19/2003/13

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 March 2003

Original: English

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Second session
New York, 12-23 May 2003
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
Mandated areas

Information received from the United Nations system

United Nations Children's Fund

Summary

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) congratulates the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for its useful recommendations. The Fund is guided in its work with indigenous communities by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UNICEF Mission Statement, the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan for the period 2002-2005 and by the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on children, entitled "A world fit for children", which makes several specific references to indigenous children. UNICEF country programme policies are based on human rights principles and focus on the most marginalized children and women.

UNICEF supports programmes at the country level in all of the priority areas defined by the Permanent Forum in its first report. Fund offices assist Governments in monitoring social indicators related to children's rights, identifying the most vulnerable and excluded groups and analysing the reasons for their exclusion. With regard to health, UNICEF supports comprehensive programmes aimed at promoting culturally sensitive health care, preventing diseases and building capacities within indigenous communities through training and dissemination of information. In the field of human rights, UNICEF promotes compliance by Governments with the standards and norms described in international conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the commitments made at international conferences. It also supports communication programmes to inform indigenous communities of their rights and how to claim them. The Fund promotes economic

* E/C.19/2003/1.

03-27723 (E) 240303

and social development, in particular by advising national and local authorities on their planning efforts and supporting social services delivery projects. Its work in education and culture focuses on access to education, school attendance and schools adapted to the needs of indigenous children, particularly through bilingual and multicultural education. On environmental issues, UNICEF works with indigenous communities to ensure that children grow up in a safe and healthy environment, with access to clean water and sanitation. The UNICEF mandate is devoted to children and youth and the Fund stands ready to support the Secretariat in gathering information on the work of the United Nations system with indigenous children.

UNICEF has available several documents on its work with indigenous communities and its Innocenti Research Centre is currently preparing a publication on the rights of indigenous children.

1. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) would like to congratulate the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on the outcome of its first session. The variety of recommendations and the setting of priorities in the report of the Forum[1] reflect the richness of the debates held on that occasion and are very encouraging for the upcoming session. UNICEF headquarters has distributed the recommendations of the Forum in the country offices that implement programmes and promote policies for and with indigenous peoples.

2. In accordance with its general mandate to ensure the fulfilment of the rights of all children, UNICEF has been working for many years with indigenous peoples, with a particular focus on the most marginalized groups. The changes brought about by the rights-based approach to programming adopted by the Fund in the late 1990s have meant that all UNICEF country programmes focus on capacity-building, participation and human rights advocacy. Reviews of programmes and policies relating to indigenous peoples take place on an annual basis, along with reviews of all UNICEF programmes at the country level. In addition to the recommendations of the Forum, UNICEF is guided in its work with indigenous communities by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Mission Statement, its medium-term strategic plan (which sets the organizational priorities for the period 2002-2005) and by the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on children, entitled "A world fit for children",[2] which mentions indigenous children in several instances.

3. The priorities established by the Permanent Forum in its first report are consistent with the priorities that have guided the Fund's work with indigenous peoples.

UNICEF internal policies relating to indigenous peoples

4. The UNICEF global Programme Policy and Procedure Manual emphasizes attention to the human rights and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at all phases of the programme process, as well as a focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized population groups.

5. During the preparation of a situation analysis or common country assessment, UNICEF country offices and United Nations country teams are requested to review data disaggregated by gender, age, location, or ethnic/language group, and to conduct in-depth assessments and analyses of the situation of highly disadvantaged groups (among them minority groups, populations living in remote areas, squatter areas and/or in extreme poverty). Offices are encouraged to use a conceptual framework to analyse the underlying reasons for disadvantage or exclusion and the opportunities for disadvantaged groups to participate in political and community decision-making processes. Where necessary, offices are to assist countries to improve national data collection systems so that disaggregated data can be collected and analysed. During the further development of the programme of cooperation, UNICEF offices are advised to select strategies that

- Achieve outcomes related to human rights and build commitment and capacity for their sustained realization
- Focus on the priority needs, rights and capacities of the most vulnerable, excluded and disadvantaged groups

- Build capacities of Governments, civil society organizations and communities, including marginalized and excluded communities.

6. A human rights approach also clarifies the role of UNICEF country offices in helping to articulate the claims of the poor, vulnerable or excluded population groups, which include indigenous peoples, and in drawing attention to their rights through advocacy with decision makers or through social mobilization. When supporting national and local planning efforts, UNICEF offices ensure attention to the rights of vulnerable and excluded children and the identification of accountabilities and necessary actions.

7. Further programme guidance on increasing the opportunities for democratic participation of young people and marginalized and excluded population groups is expected to be issued by UNICEF in 2003.

UNICEF work in the priority areas defined by the Permanent Forum in its first report[3]

1. Information-gathering

8. UNICEF offices assist Governments in monitoring social indicators related to children's rights, identify the most vulnerable and excluded groups and analyse the reasons for their exclusion. Those indicators are used to update any specific situation analysis of the rights of children and women and to adjust programmes of cooperation during annual or otherwise scheduled programme reviews and evaluations. So far, data collection by ethnicity and indigenous origin has taken place at the country level. Studies are being carried out with UNICEF support in a number of countries in order to get the information needed to determine the specific situation of indigenous children and women. Data collection and analysis on disparities and discrimination — by including data disaggregated by gender, geographic location, poverty status, culture/ethnicity and other locally relevant categories — is key to that process. The studies in question include Mayan traditions and perceptions about work and education in Guatemala, a community survey of 11 Amazon villages in Guyana, culturally appropriate integrated educational strategies for children of indigenous people in the Philippines, the incidence of maternal mortality in three rural states with large indigenous populations in Mexico and research on the child-raising practices of the indigenous population in Ecuador.

2. Health

9. UNICEF is aware that access to health care for indigenous peoples is too often hindered by cultural barriers as well as by the fact that indigenous communities often live in remote areas where no health facilities are available. Parents' lack of information and lack of preventive measures in indigenous communities is also an obstacle to the healthy development of their children. Thus, UNICEF supports comprehensive programmes aimed at promoting culturally sensitive health care, preventing diseases and building capacities within indigenous communities through training and dissemination of information. Areas in which such programmes take place include immunization, nutrition, safe motherhood, access to health care and HIV/AIDS prevention, as well as mental health for indigenous children affected by conflict. Some examples follow.

10. In Peru, activities for reducing child mortality included the strengthening of the immunization programme in isolated areas of the Amazon region and community education for the treatment, detection and referral of cases of diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections in rural Andean and Amazon areas.

11. In Guatemala, UNICEF developed a local mass media communication strategy for the nutritional crisis for the vulnerable population. Radio segments were broadcast in Chorti and Spanish on malnutrition and nourishment for children under 2 years of age.

12. In Colombia, pregnant and nursing women in more than 40 municipalities which have the lowest social development indicators benefited from actions to identify and reduce maternal risks and promote breastfeeding and quality care in maternal health services. To accomplish that, UNICEF carried out activities such as the training of health and community leaders in epidemiological surveillance, risk management and production of educational materials on prevention for radio dissemination to indigenous, Afro-Colombian and farmer communities.

13. In four municipalities in Venezuela, all health aides in the only health service provided to scattered indigenous communities were trained in community advice for breastfeeding, with the help of kits for information multiplication. Similar actions in three other municipalities, along with the production of materials for communities in their mother tongues, are pending for 2003. In other countries, including Argentina, El Salvador and Malaysia, UNICEF has supported the training of traditional birth attendants and health service agents for indigenous communities.

14. In Malaysia, UNICEF has helped to train primary health care workers, traditional birth attendants and traditional healers working with Orang Asli at the district level and has started implementing a programme to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS to out-of-school young people. That is being done by promoting youth participation in the design and implementation of interventions. Indigenous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with community-based activities were involved. In Panama, UNICEF developed a pilot project in the region of Coclé to train adolescents and parents in the prevention of HIV/AIDS. UNICEF also promotes nutrition campaigns for marginalized populations who are at risk of malnutrition.

15. Mental health is also an issue of focus for the Fund's work, especially in areas where indigenous populations have been affected by conflict. In Guatemala, teachers have been trained in psychosocial assistance to children. Currently, 1,000 schools are applying the psychosocial rehabilitation methodology.

3. Human rights

16. UNICEF offices aim to reinforce and promote compliance by Governments, including local authorities, with the standards and norms described in international conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the goals, targets and declarations agreed to at international conferences. Advocacy for children's rights is central to UNICEF support to indigenous peoples, as confronting discrimination is a first step towards respect for human rights. UNICEF also supports social communication programmes which inform indigenous peoples, particularly women and children, of their rights and how to claim them. In Venezuela, UNICEF supports the annual "Convivencia de Niños y Niñas Indígenas"

(Meeting of Indigenous Boys and Girls), which takes place during the international week of indigenous peoples, a cultural exchange organized by the Wayuu Women's Network in Zulia state. In Thailand, following a recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF supported the dissemination of indigenous language versions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the production of child rights audiotapes for the highland communities in the north of the country. In Viet Nam, through the Mai Communication Initiative, UNICEF has supported the production of materials, newspapers and animated films in indigenous and minority languages to teach children about their rights. In Bolivia, the Fund supports the publication of a trilingual (Quechua, Aymara and Guaraní) paper, which is issued as an annex to a major national newspaper.

4. Economic and social development

17. UNICEF representatives and professional staff advise national and local counterparts as required, and participate in national or local planning efforts with a view to ensuring a sustained focus on the most vulnerable and excluded population groups, families and children. Specific UNICEF support is set out in country programmes of cooperation. Its social service delivery projects in health, nutrition, water and sanitation all benefit indigenous peoples and increase their capacity to manage such services. Policy reform is also recognized as critical to improving the lives of indigenous peoples. In Peru, UNICEF supported the review of national laws in terms of discrimination against children of indigenous peoples, providing legal and technical advice to the Senate and the House of Representatives. A new area of activity for UNICEF cooperation in Ecuador is within the framework of the National Dialogue agreed upon between indigenous and *campesino* organizations and the Government. The Fund supported the elaboration of proposals on fiscal reform and social spending, social policies and the public budget, and the situation of indigenous people's access to education and health. In Guatemala, UNICEF and its counterparts carried out a consultative process in order to generate a proposal for an Intercultural Policy for Youth. Adolescents and youth actively participated in the process and their proposals, suggestions and demands on such issues as participation, respect for diversity, culture, health, education and employment were taken into account.

5. Education and culture

18. Owing to historical discrimination, among other factors, indigenous peoples have often had disproportionately less access to education than the non-indigenous population. Key to the Fund's strategy for the reduction of poverty and disparities is access to education through emphasis on reaching the most vulnerable, marginalized and deprived children. UNICEF also believes it is essential that each and every child develop in a friendly and harmonious environment, in which his or her culture and language are recognized and respected. As a significant part of the child's environment, schools have a crucial role to play in the development of the child's identity and sense of belonging. In that context, UNICEF has undertaken multiple initiatives in cooperation with national counterparts to ensure that indigenous children have access to education, attend school and that schools are adapted to their needs. One of the areas where the Fund has made a special effort is in the promotion of bilingual and multicultural education and curriculum material.

19. In Ecuador, in collaboration with local counterparts, UNICEF promoted a social mobilization strategy for school enrolment. That strategy was designed to identify children who have abandoned school, promote their reinsertion and guarantee the child's retention in school. Schools monitored a follow-up of students who completed the previous academic year but did not return for the new year, investigated the reasons for their desertion with parents and informed provincial authorities and the Ministry of Education of the causes. Almost 300,000 children living in marginalized areas and belonging to the bilingual educational system of the country have benefited directly from the strategy. In Peru, UNICEF supported the training of bilingual teachers in rural areas of the Amazon with a view to improving teacher performance. To solve the problem of lack of educational materials, it supported the Ministry of Education to prepare basic educational materials that facilitate learning, while taking into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of the region. Since the native languages of Andean and Amazon areas are mainly oral, there are few printed materials in those languages. UNICEF therefore supported the production of texts and the recording of local legends and stories in those languages, with the help of parents, adolescents and teachers. In Bolivia, the Bilingual Intercultural Education Project is carried out by the Ministry of Education and Culture, with the technical and financial support of UNICEF and various donors. The project was first implemented in rural schools with three majority indigenous languages and was expanded to include more than 10 linguistic groups. The principal achievement was the gradual introduction of Spanish into the curriculum. Beginning with the first grade, Spanish was progressively introduced during the five years of basic education, through teaching methods for second languages. That project had significant results in two respects: improved school performance of children and empowerment of the communities and indigenous organizations. In Namibia, a project is under way that aims to integrate San children into the mainstream educational system by training San community resource persons who mediate in cases of conflict and provide necessary assistance to parents and follow up cases of dropout.

6. Environment

20. Sustainable development and environmentally sound projects are priority concerns in all UNICEF-supported programmes. The Fund works with indigenous communities to ensure that children grow in a safe and healthy environment, with access to clean water and sanitation. In Paraguay, UNICEF contributed to the construction of water systems in 11 indigenous and rural communities. In El Salvador, it supported the preparation of a guide for health promoters on the themes of water, sanitation and environment with the consistent contribution of native communities, to include their point of view, assure the impartiality of the guide, and avoid cultural clashes. The guide has a Nahuat name, *Ne Kal at Yejc*, the "House of Healthy Water". In Panama, UNICEF supported the installation and functioning of 111 rural mini-aqueducts in the western indigenous region of Nogbe Bugle, benefiting 7,000 indigenous children.

7. Children and youth

21. Clearly, all the Fund's work is aimed at fulfilling the rights of children. While sectoral programmes are an essential part of its programming, comprehensive integrated programmes are also deemed crucial, especially for younger children, and

are part of the Fund's organizational priorities. UNICEF also supports subregional integrated programmes, taking into account the fact that some indigenous communities extend across international borders.

22. Integrated early childhood development programmes are a part of UNICEF-assisted country programmes focusing on indigenous peoples in Brazil, Guatemala, Suriname, Namibia, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela. The Fund contributes towards the provision of basic services for indigenous populations in countries such as Argentina, Suriname, El Salvador, Peru and Venezuela. In El Salvador, the UNICEF-assisted PROMAYA project supplied latrines, potable water, educational materials and training in primary health care. In the Caribbean area, the Suriname Integrated Area Based Programme serves 53,000 indigenous Amerindians and Maroons living in the Amazon basin, provides basic services and builds capacity. In Argentina, in 2000, work began in two indigenous communities in the south-western province of Neuquen, to provide drinking water and install sewer systems in households and schools. In Guatemala, UNICEF provides integrated support for the fulfilment of children's right to health, education, information, participation, protection and recreation to eight indigenous municipalities.

23. The Fund's subregional programme for the Andean region (PROANDES) comprises areas of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela, where indigenous peoples are mainly Quechua and Aymara. UNICEF-supported interventions originally focused on addressing poverty through the delivery of basic social services through community-based child development programmes, technical support to local governments and the expansion of social services, including access to safe water. An important achievement has been the multicultural, multilingual approach to education and health programmes by incorporating Andean cultural traditions into service delivery. Prevention of family violence and child abuse has been another major intervention and has been achieved through conducting training activities for the judicial system and police forces and creating new institutions to foster community involvement.

24. The Amazon subregional programme contains portions of Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela, which covers 400 indigenous groups. Strategies for reducing social disparities and improving human development have included: child rights advocacy; local institutional strengthening; community participation through alliance with civil society actors such as local NGOs, churches and local governments; and multicultural health and education interventions.

UNICEF publications and Internet services related to indigenous issues

25. UNICEF supports the production of many publications on its programmes with indigenous communities and for indigenous communities in indigenous languages.

26. Publications on UNICEF programmes in Peru, Brazil, Costa Rica and Venezuela analyse the dimensions of Fund actions in those countries, where many indigenous communities live, drawing the focus on lessons learned with respect to rights-based programming. Publications that target indigenous audiences include bilingual schoolbooks, health manuals in indigenous languages and translations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into indigenous languages. Some publications also aim at making indigenous cultures known in the whole society and

at sensitizing decision makers to indigenous issues. UNICEF also supports the production of video materials on issues related to indigenous peoples.

27. Internet web sites containing information on indigenous issues may be found on the existing sites of UNICEF country offices working with indigenous peoples. In Latin America, those sites may be reached through the web site of the regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean: http://www.uniceflac.org/ingles/offices_region.htm. Other country office web sites with information on indigenous issues include:

- Viet Nam: http://www.unicef.org/vietnam/
- Philippines: http://www.unicef.org/philippines/
- Namibia: http://www.un.na/unicef.htm.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 23* and corrigendum (E/2002/43/Rev.1 and Corr.1).

[2] General Assembly resolution S-27/2.

[3] In no priority area could it be possible to provide a full listing of UNICEF support to indigenous peoples. The examples provided should thus be considered as indicative, not exhaustive.